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CC:
Subject: Scranton Times Tribune (1-12) Editorial: 'Rudimentary' regulation

Editorial: Rudimentary regulation

January 12, 2011

The Corbett administration's top environmental officer contends that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is not "up to speed" regarding contaminated well water in Dimock Twp., Susquehanna County.

Cabot Oil & Gas Corp. has stopped delivering clean water to some residents in Dimock Twp. who contend that nearby gas drilling has fouled their wells. The state Department of Environmental Protection, headed by Michael Krancer, has signed off on that decision. The EPA has decided to resume investigating, prompting Mr. Krancer's assertion that the federal agency has only a "rudimentary" understanding of the situation.

Well, when it comes to the impacts of natural gas drilling, Michael Krancer, secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection, knows a great deal about not being "up to speed."

An analysis by the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette has found that Mr. Krancer's agency does not have records for 495 wells that are producing or are about to produce gas.

By the DEP's own estimate, that's about 12 percent of all gas wells statewide, a substantial error rate given that the agency is supposed to craft permits and inspect every well.

Of those 495 wells, 182 do not even appear on the state's Marcellus Shale well permit list, raising the rudimentary question of how the agency is supposed to determine if those wells comply with permit conditions.

The DEP's failure to account for the wells will be even more problematic if the Legislature ever gets around to passing a severance tax or local impact fee on gas drilling. Any such levy would have to rely on the DEP data base.

Mr. Krancer's agency discovered last summer that Cabot improperly had constructed a well in Susquehanna County and that at least three nearby water wells had been contaminated as a result. Then, the agency violated its own policy by not publicly posting the information, at the same time it signed off on Cabot's controversial decision to stop water deliveries relative to the Dimock Twp. wells.

The EPA's Dimock Twp. inquiry is valid. Mr. Krancer should get his own agency up to speed.

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